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RESEARCH ARTICLE



## Insecurity, Informal Trade and Timber Trafficking in the Gambia/Casamance Borderlands

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### ABSTRACT

The Gambia's long frontier with Casamance, southern Senegal, has historically been porous allowing informal cross-border trade to flourish. With context from colonial times, the paper examines the post-independence period, during which flows of agricultural and forest products mainly from Casamance into The Gambia have continued, while processed foods and manufactured goods have been traded in the other direction. Certain flows have become pathological since the Casamance rebellion began in 1982, with natural resources being traded by both Senegalese government and separatist forces, and arms trafficked to the latter partly through Gambian channels. With the conflict now of low intensity though not resolved, continued illegal timber exploitation in Casamance driven mainly by international actors is becoming more environmentally destructive and locally divisive. The paper argues that informal cross-border trade has long been bound up with insecurity at local, national, transnational and international levels, and that contemporary dynamics show some historical continuities.

### KEYWORDS

Casamance; Senegal; Gambia; war economies; timber trafficking; rosewood

## Introduction

In January 2018, an armed group killed fourteen male youths and injured several others while they were on a timber-cutting expedition in the Bayot *forêt classée* (state forest), near Bourofaye in Casamance – Senegal's southern limb, sandwiched between The Gambia and Guinea-Bissau (France 24 2018).<sup>1</sup> Casamance is sadly familiar with sporadic violence after four decades of conflict rooted in a separatist rebellion by the *Mouvement des forces démocratiques de la Casamance* (MFDC). Civilians have occasionally been attacked or killed before in the general area where the incident took place, towards the Guinea-Bissau border, typically when they have transgressed lines of MFDC territorial control. Such violence has usually occurred amid the return of communities following long-term displacement, an ongoing process since the turn of the millennium (Evans 2014).

This particular attack made no sense seen through that lens, however, especially given the relative calming of the Casamance conflict in recent years. Even the Senegalese army could not say whether the MFDC military wing, the *maquis*, was involved while the MFDC itself blamed others (France 24 2018) – although uncertainties and denials

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about the perpetrators of killings and robberies are common in Casamance. Rather, different tensions seemed to be at work as reports claimed that in November 2017, other youths had been captured and roughed up by locals angry at illegal timber-cutting in the area, with villagers also establishing “vigilance committees” to protect their forests (RFI 2018). Local civilians were indeed arrested for the killings, although they and their communities have strongly protested their innocence. When the author last visited Ziguinchor (the nearby regional capital) and villages affected, the incident was still causing much local upset, as has the long detention of the accused pending trial.<sup>2</sup>

Whoever was responsible, then, these killings seemed to be more about local natural resource disputes than the struggle for Casamance independence (although the paper argues that these issues intersect in specific ways). Proximally there appeared to be a clash between rural people trying to protect their forests (still fairly intact in that area) and predatory, urban-based timber demand. The key agents of urban demand in Casamance are *menuisiers* (joiners), the main buyers of timber in Ziguinchor and other towns, mostly for making artisanal furniture and fixtures for homes and offices. As one local businessman wryly explained how he saw the context of the killings, “Ziguinchor’s *menuisiers* are very stubborn”.<sup>3</sup> This obstinacy certainly speaks to poverty and a need for *menuisiers* to make money from whatever resources are available by serving, in their case, mainly national markets. This is, however, only part of a bigger, increasingly internationalized picture of timber exploitation that also involves longstanding currents of informal trade across Casamance’s northern border with The Gambia, and modern global trade networks.

The paper builds on field research conducted during multiple visits to Casamance and The Gambia from 2000 to 2019 and includes previously unpublished material. Much of the data gathered comprises semi-structured interviews with key informants (selected through purposive sampling) and simple observations, together with a small quantitative survey of *menuisiers* (reported in Evans 2003). These primary data are coupled with secondary sources, mostly national and Western media coverage and international non-governmental organization (INGO) reports. The paper first considers dynamics along the border in colonial times, then moves to the post-independence era, particularly the period of the Casamance rebellion, focusing on the (ongoing) illegal exploitation of timber. A concluding discussion argues, as the paper’s contribution to this special issue, that informal trade flows across the Gambia/Casamance border have long been bound up with insecurity at local, national, transnational and international levels. Contemporary dynamics show some historical continuities, as the case of timber trafficking demonstrates, which further problematize modern notions of “war economies” – understood here as economic activities conducted by, or in support of, the war effort or livelihoods of active combatants in a conflict zone. In the Casamance context, it is already difficult analytically to isolate these activities from wider informal trade (Evans 2003).

The choice of Casamance timber as a case study has three justifications. First, while other authors, notably Nugent (2019), have explored political, economic and social dynamics across the Gambia/Casamance border over nearly all the timespan discussed (excepting very recent years), in-depth examination of timber trafficking expands this coverage. Second, such a study is consonant with the focus on exploitation of local natural resources evident in much of the “war economies” literature. Timber specifically has long been illegally exploited by combatants elsewhere in West and Central Africa

(and beyond, for example in Cambodia). The first phase of the Liberian civil war (1989–1997) provides a well-documented case of large-scale timber extraction for export by both insurgents and counter-insurgency forces including ECOMOG (Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) Military Observer Group) peacekeepers (Ellis 1999). Ongoing insurgency in the eastern Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) is also partly supported by the timber trade (UNEP-MONUSCO-OSESG 2015). These cases show that mechanized plant can enhance timber exploitation but even where chainsaws and sawmills are unavailable, combatants or civilians working for them may cut timber using hand tools. From a theoretical perspective, this underscores how different types of natural resource vary in the extent to which they can be exploited by actors in conflicts. Ross (2004, 350) characterizes resources like timber as “lootable [because] they can be easily appropriated by individuals or small groups of unskilled workers”. The mostly manual exploitation of timber (and woodfuels) by combatants in Casamance has been known for some time but with little coverage in the academic literature to date (Evans 2003; Nugent 2007). The third reason to examine Casamance timber is biogeographical. The studies cited above (Liberia and the DRC) come from the “forest belt”; moving northward from there, natural vegetation grades into wooded then increasingly open savannas, providing less favorable territory overall for timber exploitation but it is still important in some contexts. As such an example, Casamance benefits from relatively the wettest climate in a mostly semi-arid country, with much of northern Senegal sitting in the Sahelian zone. Casamance timber is a nationally significant resource but thus also vulnerable to overexploitation, and the environments concerned are more ecologically sensitive to deforestation (Tappan et al. 2004).

Regarding terminology, words like “illegal”, “trafficking” and “smuggling” are used in the paper but with caution. Following Meagher (2014, 498fn), much of what is considered is simply “unrecorded import–export trade, also referred to as informal cross-border or transborder trade”. In a subregional context where informal economic activity is a widespread, normal livelihood for the majority, notions of “illegality” often unhelpfully misrepresent what happens on the ground. Such terminology is, however, applied here where production and/or trade are more egregiously illegal under national and sometimes international law, notably in the case of much Casamance timber; and where cross-border trade has been an active means of subversion, including smuggling during the Vichy era and contemporary arms supply to insurgents.

## Historical Contexts

Contemporary patterns of trade and human mobility between Casamance and The Gambia relate to the circumstances under which the border was created and managed in colonial times. Nugent (2019) recounts historical turbulence in the border area between Lower Casamance and the Gambia<sup>4</sup> in the latter nineteenth century. Attempts at violent *jihad* by marabouts and associated plunder hampered British and French desires to acquire territory and control trade (particularly in wild rubber and ground-nuts) and depopulated the border area through forced displacement. Amid formal partition of Africa in the late 1880s, efforts to defuse colonial rivalries and reduce insecurity in the area saw the Anglo-French Agreement of 1889 define the borders of the Gambia, the culmination of a longer process of bordering (Perfect and Evans 2013; Nugent 2019).

Apart from slight modifications in the 1970s to try to rectify uncertainties, these borders remain largely unchanged. From the late nineteenth century onward, then, the two colonial powers operated mostly in a more peaceful setting, vying to control trade and attract people into each colony's border zone from the other's territory. This competition became a central, recurrent feature of relations between the British and French colonial authorities in the Gambia and Casamance, respectively, for much of the first half of the twentieth century (Nugent 2019).

Social ties and population mobility/settlement became more generally bound up with trade, economic development and at times security (in both colonies and beyond) across the porous border. In the earlier twentieth century, manufactured goods from Europe were traded from the Gambia to Senegal, while agricultural produce moved either way across the border though mainly into the Gambia. Most trade was informal despite occasional cross-border agreements between the colonial powers in other domains, notably security (Nugent 2019). Such customs controls that existed were ineffective, circumvented or ignored. While differentials in supply and price drove this trade, Nugent (2019) notes the importance of geography, too, as the wharf towns on the Gambia River were closer to much of the Senegalese population than French commercial centers – a point resonating with contemporary informal trade flows. This period also saw populations convert to Islam through peaceful means (earlier, forcible attempts having mostly provoked resistance or flight), either *in situ* or through migration. Economic forces supported the latter dynamic as growing numbers of Lower Casamançais, particularly from the area north of the Casamance River, migrated seasonally to undertake groundnut cultivation and harvesting of oil palm produce and wild rubber in the Gambia, where they individually converted to Islam (Foucher 2002). At times before and during the First World War and in the interwar years, the Gambia also provided a refuge for those escaping harsher aspects of life in Senegal including various taxes, labor service requirements and conscription; and periodic French heavy-handedness in “pacifying” Casamance, which continued up to the 1920s (Nugent 2019).

The porosity of the border continued in the Second World War even once France surrendered to Germany in June 1940. As part of *Afrique Occidentale Française* (AOF; French West Africa), Senegal was controlled by the Vichy government, allied to Nazi Germany, until December 1942. The Gambia and Senegal formally closed their common border and relations between the respective colonial governments were tense. There was no open conflict, though, partly because the Gambia's geographical vulnerability meant that the British authorities tried to maintain cordial relations with their counterparts in Senegal (Perfect and Evans 2013). Still, cross-border flows became embroiled in economic warfare and espionage, with trade forming part of bigger geopolitical dynamics. France viewed colonies like Senegal as strategically important sources of raw materials and foodstuffs. To undermine this trade, the British imposed a naval blockade on AOF, preventing exports and imports and creating shortages of various foodstuffs, fuel and manufactured goods there (Ginio 2006). In this context, the late Abbé Augustin Diamacoune Senghor (1928–2007), long-time Secretary-General of the modern MFDC, recalled as an anecdote that Vichy Dakar levied “taxes” on Casamance in five forms: money, wild rubber, honey, rice and livestock.<sup>5</sup> This is partly corroborated by Nugent (2019), who records that rice and cattle were requisitioned from Casamance. Food shortages and rationing were certainly of concern to the AOF administration, which



feared unrest among an African population faced with requisitioning, wider economic hardship and conscription (Ginio 2006; Nugent 2019). In Casamance, however, despite resentment, further flight of people into the Gambia (and Portuguese Guinea, modern-day Guinea-Bissau) and some renewed resistance, political instability did not become widespread.

Shortages in Senegal and the Gambia were partly mitigated through local coping mechanisms, particularly informal cross-border trade, which grew in both directions. Indeed, the British actively encouraged smuggling of foodstuffs from AOF to destabilize the Vichy regime economically and alleviate pressures in the Gambia (Ginio 2006; Nugent 2019). British-run networks were extensive, sometimes penetrating deep into Senegalese territory, where advantageous prices for smuggling products into the Gambia were actively promoted to locals. One French colonial record states that smugglers from Senegal were also bartering agricultural products such as groundnuts and millet for textiles in the Gambia at a rate set by the British administration (Ginio 2006). These networks were furthermore used for espionage by the British (and by the Free French mission in Bathurst, modern-day Banjul), with smugglers supplying information from and disseminating propaganda in Vichy territory. Both sides recognized the threats posed by these activities: the British dealt harshly with those caught smuggling goods to Senegal outside of their control, while the Vichy regime arrested a significant number of spies (Ginio 2006; Perfect and Evans 2013).

Moving into the era of decolonization and independence, various attempts at political integration between Senegal and The Gambia, culminating in the Senegambia Confederation (1982–1989), ultimately failed because of political differences and did not bring about significant economic and trade integration (Nugent 2019). Liberalization under neoliberal reforms from the 1980s onward also largely failed to establish more formal free trade regimes. Instead, these reforms did the opposite across West Africa: the resulting hardships drove expansion and restructuring of informal trade as people sought alternative livelihoods (Meagher 2003). Colonial legacies have had a continued influence, too, with currency differences acting as an important driver of informal cross-border trade in the context considered here and across the subregion (Meagher 2014). The CFA franc, originally pegged against the French franc and since 1999 the euro, is the common, stable currency for most Francophone countries including Senegal (and Guinea-Bissau since 1997), in contrast with the individual, floating currencies of Anglophone countries such as the Gambian dalasi.

Meanwhile ECOWAS, the subregional bloc, began implementing a free trade area between its (now 15) member states in 1990 (it was first planned in 1979) and a customs union in 2015, although the latter is still a work in progress (ECOWAS 2019). These initiatives now map onto the grander African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA), which became notionally operational at the start of 2021. The AfCFTA faces formidable obstacles, though, in achieving integration and harmonization of trade between states that are economically and politically disparate and often physically poorly connected. Inadequate transport infrastructure, limited regulatory capacity and poor governance in many countries, and political reluctance or overt protectionism in a few, are also likely to hamper implementation (Ayeni 2020). Ultimately a continental customs union is mooted but this is an even more distant prospect. In any case, like the ECOWAS accords, the AfCFTA will probably make little impact on the great majority of

people, for whom border posts and customs controls are still often sites of predation and corruption as far as movement of their goods (and themselves) is concerned. Local populations will mostly continue to view the formal structures of borders as problems to get through, work around or bypass entirely.

## War and Peace Economies

Differentials in price and availability of goods across the Gambia/Casamance border, as well as geography, remain strong drivers for informal trade. Natural produce like fruits, palm oil, cannabis and timber commonly move from Casamance into The Gambia. In the other direction, processed foods like tea, sugar and white rice, plus manufactured goods including plastic items and textiles, move into Casamance from The Gambia, where such goods are appreciably cheaper. Travelling the sandy back roads reveals the extent of this trade. An example is seen in Touba (Senegal) and Darsilami (The Gambia), villages contiguously straddling the border several kilometers west of the official Séléti/Giboro border post (which sits on the main road linking Ziguinchor to urban coastal areas of The Gambia): in Darsilami a small shop full of rice, sugar and tea evidently serves the immediately adjacent Casamance market.<sup>6</sup> Similarly *voitures de fraude* (smuggling cars, typically Land Rovers) laden with such commodities and manufactures can be seen in daytime on back roads or loading up in the Gambian town of Brikama – a well-established stocking point, reflecting its historical importance as a trading center (Nugent 2019). In places these vehicles avoid roads altogether: locals can point out their tire tracks in the estuarine flats behind Djinaki, west of the Ziguinchor–Séléti road.<sup>7</sup> These trajectories minimize the chances of interception by Senegalese Customs officers, whose checkpoints are mostly on main roads, thus helping informal traders get their goods smoothly from The Gambia to urban markets in Lower Casamance towns like Bignona and Ziguinchor.

For communities along the border and beyond, then, informal trade is normalized and quite visible. It is a livelihood and money-saving activity for many people. Even for Customs officers on both sides, interception of contraband is arguably driven more by predatory rent-seeking through collecting bribes as an additional “livelihood” than by a desire legally to enforce trade rules and impose duties. Furthermore, The Gambia’s position as an *entrepôt* state, from its colonial past to the present, means that the informal re-export trade – “smuggling” in plain sight – has long been key to supporting the country’s formal economy, leaving little incentive for the authorities there, at any level, to restrict it (Meagher 2014; Nugent 2019).

Some informal cross-border trade may, however, be pathologically bound up with violence and environmental degradation. Understanding this requires a brief introduction to West Africa’s arguably longest-running civil conflict. The separatist rebellion of the MFDC originated in local protests in the 1970s and 1980s revolving around discontent with government from Dakar, perceived deliberate underdevelopment of Casamance, cultural differences from Senegal north of The Gambia, and the claim that Casamance had full political autonomy during colonial times (Evans 2004). While poor governance and marginalization of Casamance can be demonstrated in certain instances, the colonial autonomy claim is baseless (Evans 2013).<sup>8</sup> Colonial cartography and borders do figure in these arguments, though, leaving The Gambia largely cutting Senegal in two and creating

a semi-exclave of Casamance, which adds to (or can be deployed to create) its sense of difference from northern Senegal and distance from Dakar.

In 1982 and 1983, this local discontent was distilled by the MFDC into two marches in Ziguinchor, capital of the then-single region of Casamance (Evans 2004). The first march was largely peaceful but the second ended in considerable bloodshed and loss of life among the protestors under still-disputed circumstances. More generally the Senegalese authorities reacted with increasingly heavy-handed repression. Driven underground, the MFDC armed itself and the *maquis* launched a violent insurgency in April 1990; mass deployment of Senegalese forces in response led to a fully militarized conflict. While the new millennium has seen the situation generally improve, this process has been erratic and geographically uneven. Some low-level insecurity persists and no comprehensive political settlement has been reached (Foucher 2019).

The development both of the rebellion and of its revenue streams were therefore improvised. The way in which the conflict escalated meant that the MFDC “had to structure itself on the spot, with very limited resources” (Foucher 2007, 177). Its original funding model of grassroots support from local populations became untenable as state repression and arrests of activists increased. Casamance offers no high-value natural resources such as gemstones, so the *maquis* has had to exploit low-value, high-volume resources from local agriculture and forests (Evans 2003). These include cashews and other orchard crops, cannabis, timber and woodfuels. Supplemented with more irregular and opportunistic resource flows including armed robbery (of shops and road vehicles) and misdirected international aid, the Casamance insurgency thus runs on what Foucher (2007, 171) aptly describes as “a war economy in rags”.

The local geographies of conflict are another important consideration. MFDC factionalism and the involvement of neighboring countries have created a complex, fragmented security environment in a relatively small space (Evans 2004; Foucher 2007). This has a bearing on the situation along the Gambia/Casamance border. The main historical division in the *maquis* was between the *Front Nord* and the *Front Sud*, their names reflecting their original areas of operation north and south of the Casamance River, respectively. This split followed the Cacheu accords, signed in April 1992 between the late Sidy Badji, original architect of the *maquis*, and the Senegalese government. While the accords aimed to consolidate a ceasefire agreed the previous year, Abbé Diamacoune denounced them for failing to address the MFDC’s demand for Casamance independence. Badji and his followers regrouped as the *Front Nord* and retired from active combat. In an informal *quid pro quo*, they were allowed effectively to retain control of much of northwest Lower Casamance, with little presence of Senegalese security forces visible in the area for the rest of the decade. This situation changed after the turn of the millennium, though (Evans and Ray 2013). Senegalese forces intervened in the fiefdom of the *Front Nord* in June 2001, driven (they claimed) by the need to secure the main roads following particularly murderous highway robberies by a rogue *Front Sud* element. The resulting destabilization increased schisms in the *maquis* north of the Casamance River during the 2000s and into the 2010s, further exacerbated by the “divide-and-rule” policy of Abdoulaye Wade, President of Senegal from April 2000 until April 2012. Army checkpoints remained, proliferating and waning at different times, but state territorial control continued to feel uneven.



Similarly, the Gambian government's security interventions in areas bordering Casamance under Yahya Jammeh, who seized power in July 1994 and subsequently became President until January 2017, were erratic and driven by perceived (indeed, mostly fabricated) concerns about threats to his/national security involving *maquis* elements and Casamance refugees on Gambian territory (Evans and Ray 2013). This refugee community, variable in size but generally in the thousands, is long-standing and very largely "self-settled" with kin or other social connections. Many refugees live in the Fonis (part of The Gambia's West Coast Region bordering Casamance), following historical cross-border patterns of human mobility. Notwithstanding occasional expulsions, Jammeh also used many of these refugees to augment his voter base for his periodic re-election (Evans and Ray 2013).

Consequently, for much of the militarized period of the Casamance conflict, insecurity and the near-absence (whether by design or dysfunction) of state authority in certain areas and at certain times have allowed *maquis* factions easier access to Casamance forests for exploitation and more control over Gambia/Casamance border trade flows. These economic activities derive from the pre-existing production base and trade routes in Casamance and across the border. This makes it analytically difficult to identify and isolate "war economies" since they necessarily stretch well beyond the actors and spaces of the rebellion into wider trade structures, bringing the risk of misinterpreting economic dynamics as conflict-related when they are actually "business as usual" (Evans 2003, 52). Meagher (2014) makes the same point for cross-border informal trade right across West Africa, challenging broad, unsubstantiated claims about the nature and extent of "war economies" and "criminalization".

Such critique does not deny that certain trades are pathological and that resources properly belonging to the state or devolved to local populations are instead sometimes exploited to support violence in Casamance. In the context of the conflict, new actors (including combatants on both sides) have become involved in various economic activities, the scale of some of which is a cause for concern, particularly the extraction of timber and woodfuels. *Maquis* elements have long "taxed" flows across the Gambian border, too, whether primary produce heading north or contraband heading south (Evans 2003). In some cases, though, the risks of hyperbole highlighted by Meagher (2014) are evident. Cannabis is another long-established Casamance product whose cultivation is favored by the climate (Evans 2003). As well as supplying local users, it is exported to The Gambia (partly to serve the tourist market) and to urban northern Senegal, despite being illegal in both countries. While *maquis* factions are involved in production and trade of cannabis, its contribution to their "war economy" has very probably been overstated. Its cultivation in Casamance is sometimes just a backyard hobby,<sup>9</sup> although cannabis farms have been reported, too. For example, when *maquis* bases near the Guinea-Bissau border fell to a major Senegalese army offensive in early 2021, associated cannabis fields – formerly providing income for the *maquisards* who fled – were seized and destroyed. While described by the army as "industrial farms", this seemed to exaggerate the extent of fields that only covered "several hectares" (Tendeng 2021a). On this scale, farms would not generate substantial revenues and such claims should be viewed critically as a means by which Senegalese state actors have sometimes sought to discredit the MFDC.

The extent to which timber and other natural resource revenues "fuel" the Casamance rebellion is similarly debatable for reasons already indicated: what is being exploited is

high-volume but low-value. It is also challenging to identify and measure the financial flows from such activity (Reid and Williams 2021) and to disentangle these from other factors that may be driving conflict. The “lootability” of timber (Ross 2004) means that its exploitation can be conducted in a geographically dynamic and opportunistic way and, while timber extraction has been associated with territorial control by the *maquis* (particularly in the *Front Nord* zone), the political economy of exploitation, discussed below, is more diverse and widespread. Still, the *maquis* has always had a talent for surviving on whatever meagre means are available; comparisons with other conflicts are informative here. In the eastern DRC, a report claims that guerrillas retain only a small percentage of the profits from natural resource exploitation (mirroring the wider primary sector in African economies) but this enables many of them to subsist and insurgent “groups to continuously resurface and destabilize the region” (UNEP-MONUSCO-OSESG 2015, 4). Long experience in West and Central Africa also shows how even low numbers of guerrillas can, with small arms and light weapons alone, create considerable insecurity and real misery for rural populations, and exert significant local control over some economic activities (Richards 1996). Much of the Casamance conflict has seen *maquisard* numbers in the low thousands (Evans 2004), now almost certainly down to the hundreds, and they have arguably become habituated to their economic activities. These include robbery and extortion from local populations but *maquis* elements may also have become socially invested in timber exploitation, supported by their implicit ability to use force if challenged but otherwise constituting a “normal” livelihood. Timber may therefore well constitute the most solid income source for the *maquis* within its makeshift “war economy”.

At a geopolitical level, by contrast, concerns over cross-border trade have focused more on imports to the *maquis* than exports: weaponry reaching *maquisards* via The Gambia and their related use of Gambian territory as a haven (Evans and Ray 2013). Similar arguments have applied to Guinea-Bissau (Evans 2004) but these fall outside the scope of the paper. Such concerns echo French colonial records about gun supply from the Gambia to Casamançais, reported for the 1920s and 1950s and probably indicative of long-standing trade flows (Nugent 2019). Furthermore, during the Casamance conflict, tense incidents have very occasionally occurred at the Gambian border, for example when, in hot pursuit of *maquis* elements, Senegalese forces have come face-to-face with Gambian troops. The need to avoid escalation of cross-border security incidents has stayed hands on all sides, however, even the *maquis* (Nugent 2019). As in most of the colonial period, some inter-state security cooperation has long been evident, albeit amid sometimes tetchy relations between Senegal and former President Jammeh over his support for the rebellion – widely suspected even if hard evidence was difficult to find (Evans and Ray 2013) – and over border controls more generally. To the frustration of successive Senegalese governments, Jammeh’s approach to such matters was an odd mix in which caprice and game-playing were hard to distinguish from domestic politicking or any foreign relations strategy. Western countries took little interest, though, despite their general disdain for Jammeh. Virtually no international diplomatic initiatives have focused on Casamance and its borders, partly reflecting Senegal’s own desire to present the conflict as no more than a domestic nuisance (Evans and Ray 2013). Macky Sall, who succeeded Wade as President of Senegal in April 2012, has been more open to foreign involvement but this has only amounted to piecemeal efforts at bilateral diplomatic or INGO mediation.

More recent subregional and international attention to The Gambia has instead focused on matters of domestic political stability, only tangentially involving Casamance. In December 2016, the Gambian presidential elections saw Jammeh refuse to step down despite his legitimate defeat by Adama Barrow. Senegal was crucial politically and militarily in subregional actions to remove Jammeh, with Barrow installed as Gambian President in January 2017 (Perfect 2017). Political uncertainty and fears of violence around this time caused around 45,000 people (of various nationalities) to flee temporarily in the opposite direction to previous displacements: from The Gambia into Senegal, including parts of Casamance (UNHCR 2017). This created local humanitarian concerns in Casamance about those displaced<sup>10</sup> and again showed how people moving both ways across the porous border have generally been accommodated and supported in times of crisis. Parallel to this, while no multilateral peacekeepers have ever been fielded to observe or contain the Casamance conflict, a subregional force – the ECOWAS Mission in The Gambia (ECOMIG) – was deployed in 2017 to help stabilize the country and secure its democratic transition. The force remains in place, with Senegal the largest contributor of troops, and its mandate has repeatedly been extended despite the Mission's controversy and increasing unpopularity among Gambians (DW 2020; Tendeng 2021b).

### **Illegal Timber: An Old Problem Amid New Global Concerns**

Illegal timber exploitation has recently brought Casamance and The Gambia to international attention amid concerns over poorly-regulated global trade networks and the deteriorating planetary environment. As noted, higher rainfall makes Casamance biogeographically distinct from much of the rest of Senegal as it allows development of wooded savannas and woodlands, with denser riparian and gallery forests in places (Tappan et al. 2004). These biomes, hereafter collectively called forests, provide timber from larger trees; wood for uses such as fencing and tools; and woodfuels (firewood and charcoal), sometimes as a by-product of bush-fallow agricultural systems or land clearance by returnees following protracted displacement (Evans 2014). Lush mangroves line the Casamance River and its expansive delta, tidal tributaries and backwaters, providing a further source of wood for fuel and other uses (Carney, Gillespie, and Rosomoff 2014). Recent changes in the Casamance landscape are apparent but tree-cutting must be distinguished from deforestation since forest will generally regrow if left to do so. Deforestation results where land is permanently converted to another use, usually agriculture or sometimes urban expansion or quarrying. It also occurs where continued grazing impedes regeneration or where cutting cycles are too frequent, producing lower and/or more open woody formations that are typically less biodiverse (Tappan et al. 2004). Unsustainable selective logging of valuable timber species, meanwhile, reduces biodiversity either directly or by disrupting various connections between species, and again typically degrades overall cover. The complex relationships between these different processes create a patchwork of vegetation types, although some areas retain relatively extensive forest cover, particularly in Lower Casamance.

These resources have long attracted exploitation beyond local use. Oral tradition suggests denser forest cover in parts of the Gambia/Lower Casamance border area in the more distant past (Nugent 2019). Later, in the Vichy era, fuel shortages due to the British blockade led the AOF administration to promote alternatives. In Senegal these

included charcoal, especially in Casamance with its forest endowment, and Senegal's recorded annual charcoal production rose from 28,723 tons in 1939 to 168,762 tons in 1941 (Ginio 2006). Any longer-term negative impact that this strategy may have had on forest cover is unknown but possible since food shortages meant that agricultural development was also encouraged at that time. Deforestation is clearly recorded in independent Senegal, though. Using satellite imagery, aerial surveys and fieldwork, Tappan et al. (2004) demonstrate a national decline in forested area from 1965 to 2000, with Casamance "showing signs of a major, potentially irreversible transformation in land use and land cover" (453) as Middle and particularly Upper Casamance suffered the pressures of agricultural expansion and charcoal production. Even supposedly-protected *forêts classées* have not been spared cutting and fragmentation. The oft-cited Pata *forêt classée* near the Gambian border in Upper Casamance has been extensively cultivated by migrants from northern Senegal, with figures ranging from nearly 29% to over 50% of forest cover lost by the late 1990s (Tappan et al. 2004; Fanchette 1999). This has provoked disputes with herders and others already using the forest, at times leading to armed violence.

In Lower Casamance, epicenter of the rebellion, illegal forest exploitation and clearance pre-date the conflict but these issues became politically mobilized in the folklore of the separatists. One of their secondary grievances has been tree-cutting for charcoal by outsiders, especially northern Senegalese, related partly to what were effectively land expropriations by northerners (Evans 2004). A poetic early separatist tract, for example, claims to speak for "this Casamance that sees [then-President] Abdou Diouf burn our forest" (translated from Glaise 1990, 88). The reality has been more nuanced, however, involving shifting constellations of actors and commodity chains spanning the Gambian border and beyond. Charcoal is an important domestic cooking fuel in urban areas of Senegal and The Gambia. Its production and trade in Senegal were historically dominated by itinerant Fulani laborers, mostly from Guinea-Conakry (Ribot 1998), but these networks have diversified over time as other ethnic groups have adopted charcoal production as an additional livelihood. It is now a cottage industry in Lower Casamance, with small numbers of sacks commonly seen outside houses of individual producers (of varied ethnicity) for sale to road travelers. Casamance charcoal is also traded into The Gambia: among many source areas, it is produced close to the border on the Senegalese side, with cuts (up to about 1 ha in size) and kilns visible in the forest there.<sup>11</sup> The historical memory of older local informants has also been instructive in this respect. One source in the then-*Front Nord* zone recalled that charcoal production by locals along the border, as well as firewood extraction from the area by Gambians, pre-date the rebellion but both activities increased with its onset.<sup>12</sup> Another source in the same zone claimed that *maquisards* began their trade in forest resources with firewood before graduating to timber.<sup>13</sup>

Extensive fieldwork in the early 2000s revealed that by then, combatants on both sides of the conflict, in cahoots with other local actors, were responsible for illegal cutting, processing trunks into planks in some cases, and trade in timber (Evans 2003). Ziguinchor and Bignona served as important hubs for the involvement of Senegalese servicemen, particularly, in this trade. The *Front Nord* and other *maquis* factions operating north of the Casamance River, meanwhile, were benefiting from exporting logs and woodfuels to The Gambia, or controlling and "taxing" this activity. Nugent (2007) thus contrasts the disingenuous romanticization of the forest by MFDC thinkers with the involvement of



the *maquis* in its exploitation. Subsequent fieldwork spanning two decades has shown the continued involvement of the *maquis* and Senegalese forces in illegal timber exploitation, even as their respective territories of direct control have generally dwindled with the relative calming of the conflict and return of many of the displaced. For the *maquis*, while still deriving revenue from cutting and selling timber, its quasi-regulatory system of charging for “permits” to transport logs seems to have become increasingly predominant (EIA 2020). For the Senegalese forces’ side, one credible source recently described how a license to cut timber along the Gambian border was granted to a chainsaw operator piggy-backing a military operation, with the product transported to The Gambia and northern Senegalese cities,<sup>14</sup> echoing earlier findings (Evans 2003).

Three related approaches can be used to understand what illegal cutting means to communities at different levels. The first concerns biodiversity. Tappan et al. (2004) express concern over erosion of floristic diversity in Casamance and by extension Senegal and its subregion. This includes timber species: the same popular hardwoods have been mentioned in interviews over the years, although their availability has varied. These include caïlcédrat (*Khaya senegalensis*, also a common street tree across the Sahel), lingue/linké (*Afzelia africana*), dimb (*Cordyla africana*) and teck (teak in English; *Tectona grandis*, introduced from South/Southeast Asia as a plantation species). The most endangered and internationally significant is ven/vène (*Pterocarpus erinaceus*), usually called rosewood in English and highly valued for furniture. Diverse forests may also provide useful genetic resources in the form of medicinal plants or gene pools for improving timber and crop species. Second, forests provide a range of ecosystem services: vegetation cover to protect soils and stabilize slopes, hydrological control for healthy watersheds, local climate moderation and – of global importance – carbon sequestration in forest biomass and soils. The third set of benefits that forests provide are livelihoods variously based on sustainable extraction of timber and wood; non-timber forest products such as fruits and game; and sometimes ecotourism. The degradation or loss of forests in Casamance is thus detrimental economically, socially and environmentally at various scales.

The same three approaches extend to mangroves, which are of similar importance but also threatened (Carney, Gillespie, and Rosomoff 2014). While West African mangroves are not diverse in their tree species, they support many bird species and economically significant fisheries and oyster beds. Mangroves also provide ecosystem services by protecting coastlines and riverbanks from storms and erosion, and again by sequestering carbon. Using satellite imagery, Carney, Gillespie, and Rosomoff (2014) map a severe decline in mangrove cover in part of northwest Lower Casamance, which saw a 92% loss from 1986 to 2010. While acknowledging the possible role of rainfall decline and local needs, they attribute this loss mainly to trade in firewood heading north, in the context of local insecurity and porous borders, to feed The Gambia’s urban coastal strip, noting its open sale in markets there. During fieldwork, firewood from both upland forests and mangroves has been seen stacked at Giboro near the official Gambian border post.<sup>15</sup>

The spaces of governance in which illegal timber exploitation takes place in and beyond Casamance are complex. On the Senegalese side, the state *Eaux et Forêts* (Water and Forests) service in principle regulates timber-cutting and trade, following – for nearly all of the period during which field research was conducted – the 1998



*Code forestier*. This *Code* has forbidden cutting in *forêts classées* while outside of these, in the *domaine national* (the national domain, covering the great majority of land), licensing of cutting has been devolved to *collectivités locales* (territorial collectivities i.e. geographically-defined local communities with elected councils) but based on management plans agreed with *Eaux et Forêts* (République du Sénégal 2017). The *Code* has also strictly prohibited the export of rosewood, a ban that was restated by Senegal in 2013 (EIA 2020). Prior to this, all timber exploitation in Lower Casamance was officially stopped in 1991 in response to the conflict; licensed sawmills there could only legally process timber sourced in Middle and Upper Casamance, a restriction that is still apparently in force.<sup>16</sup>

Fieldwork has long revealed such restrictions to be largely meaningless, though: on the ground, cutting is mostly unregulated, once described by a senior *Eaux et Forêts* official as “anarchic exploitation”.<sup>17</sup> This has continued over the past three decades, although the reasons given vary according to the source. *Eaux et Forêts* have credibly claimed that regulatory enforcement in the face of widespread illegal activity has been hampered by two factors.<sup>18</sup> The first is lack of means, especially vehicles (cars/pickups, motorbikes/mopeds or even bicycles); or where these are available, parts and fuel are limited. This makes policing rural source areas for timber particularly difficult, which may explain why seizures of illegally-cut logs or sawn timber have more commonly been reported in urban areas or on main roads. And second, insecurity, because certain forests are deemed to be under *maquis* control or the perceived risk of highway robbery by *maquisards* on certain stretches of road is sometimes appreciable. The limited presence of state regulators was reflected among *menuisiers* surveyed in Lower Casamance in 2001, of whom little more than a quarter reported problems with the authorities, most commonly *Eaux et Forêts* and less frequently *gendarmes* or police (Evans 2003).

The problems indicated by *menuisiers* also highlight a dual character to the actions of *Eaux et Forêts*, spanning apparent law enforcement and corrupt rent-seeking. At first sight the former could be evinced by confiscation of illegal timber: in 2000, for example, the service seized two Gambian lorries at Badiana, on the main road running towards the Gambian border, trying to ship out a “fortune” in timber.<sup>19</sup> Such successes have sometimes been celebrated in the media: the following year, three Gambians were arrested and their vehicles seized in the Pata area while illegally exploiting another *forêt classée* near the border for timber, dead wood and charcoal; the report also alleged complicity among local people (Diao 2001). It is questionable, however, whether due process is always followed in these actions and where “fines” levied on offenders actually go. *Menuisiers* surveyed made little distinction between the risks of formal prosecution and corrupt exactions (Evans 2003). “Payments” to *Eaux et Forêts* agents and *gendarmes* to enable the transport of timber, as distinct from legitimate permit fees (although these are sometimes paid), seem to form an accepted part of the business model for many dealing in illegally-cut timber. Allegations of corrupt practices in *Eaux et Forêts* continue, evinced in recent fieldwork and by investigative journalists and INGOs. There is little incentive for whistleblowing, and official denials and blame deflection from senior figures abound (Farge 2015). *Collectivités locales* are similarly open to corruption and other abuses, and even those trying to act legally have limited enforcement capacity. In any case, support that they should receive from *Eaux et Forêts* in managing forests in the *domaine national* is lacking for reasons already indicated.

Following the commodity chain, exporting logs from Casamance must require the involvement or collusion not only of Senegalese authorities on roads north and at the border, but also their Gambian counterparts. Both may sometimes be evaded by using back roads but again much exploitation and trafficking happen in plain sight. Cutting of large trees has been evident along the main Ziguinchor–Sélédi road throughout field research and the author has seen Gambian-registered lorries carrying logs northward; these logs are sometimes large, up to 1.5 m in diameter.<sup>20</sup> The lorries take much the same established, often informal routes for other forms of crossing to and from The Gambia, whether by people using unregistered bus services or goods in *voitures de fraude*. Large logs are also visible in roadside timber yards in The Gambia's urban coastal areas.<sup>21</sup> Similar daylight images of transport, storage and processing of logs at various points appear in recent media and INGO reports (Attwood 2020; EIA 2020; TRIAL International 2020).

The geography of demand has changed significantly over time. At the start of field research, much of the final market for timber and furniture beyond Casamance itself was apparently in the cities of northern Senegal and The Gambia. International exports mainly supplied niche buyers such as members of the Casamance diaspora in France wanting hardwood furniture from home (Evans 2003). The trade has become much more internationalized, though, and China is now a major player, its annual imports of timber products from West and Central Africa having grown more than four-fold in only a decade up to 2014 (Farge 2015). China is thus subject to growing criticism for driving illegal logging in the subregion (EIA 2020). Chinese buyers are less visible in Casamance itself, described by one source as “in the shadows” and never encountered directly,<sup>22</sup> although they are seen in The Gambia (EIA 2020).

Indeed, Senegalese supply has been hidden until quite recently behind The Gambia's continuing role as an *entrepôt* state, providing for easy transshipment of Casamance timber. The Gambia's timber exports and the presence of large logs on its territory look anomalous, however, as even to the casual observer, the country's forest cover is limited and larger trees much less evident than in Casamance.<sup>23</sup> Long-standing claims that Jammeh and his associates were involved in the Casamance timber trade were more clearly evidenced in the latter years of his regime and subsequently (Evans 2003; EIA 2020). This involvement resonated with his need to cultivate constituencies in border areas, on both sides, for electoral support (Evans and Ray 2013; Nugent 2019). The public face was somewhat different: under Jammeh, The Gambia prohibited the harvest and export of domestic rosewood from 2011 while allowing re-export of rosewood from outside the country, although it banned all log imports from Casamance in 2016 (EIA 2020) – Jammeh's last year in power. In practice these measures were, like parallel legislation in Senegal, largely meaningless and ineffective.

Despite hopes for better governance in the post-Jammeh era, China still imported an estimated 300,000 tons of rosewood from The Gambia in the three years or so after Barrow became President, equivalent to about half a million trees (EIA 2020; BBC Africa Eye 2020). These figures need qualification because the difficulties in obtaining reliable, fine-grained data on informal flows mean that the provenance and scale of timber extraction, and the size of accompanying financial transfers, are hard to ascertain and mostly inferred (EIA 2020; Reid and Williams 2021). Still, they illustrate the Barrow government's cosmetic and ineffectual actions to curtail the rosewood trade: a ban on all

imports, transport and exports of timber was announced in February 2017 but with a transition period, later extended to July of that year, during which re-export of stockpiled contraband timber from Senegal was allowed (EIA 2020). A new Gambian Forest Act in March 2018 also sought to stop Casamance–Gambia–China timber trafficking, and in August 2018 Senegal and The Gambia announced a bilateral enforcement initiative to combat the trade; but the export ban was again temporarily lifted in The Gambia between December 2018 and May 2019 to allow stockpiled timber to be shipped out (EIA 2020). Overall, this indicates weak political will set against the clout held by vested interests in this trade in The Gambia; and little incentive on the ground to cease or police such activity, which is largely allowed to continue generating revenues for those concerned.

In sum, various attempts in domestic law in both Senegal and The Gambia to prevent timber-cutting and trafficking over three decades have been half-hearted and largely ineffective. It is not a domestic political priority in either country, and never has been. For those directly involved, timber trafficking is not a matter of evading law enforcement. Instead, it is a matter of informal negotiation with predatory authorities including agents of the Senegalese and Gambian states, and/or with the *maquis*, which still has significant control of certain routes. The role of the international community, meanwhile, has been limited. Donors and diplomats talk increasingly about sustainable development and environmental concerns but exploitation of Senegal's forests is regarded as a sovereign matter. Timber is of little interest compared with the country's other natural endowments (notably oil, gas and gold) and other economic activities with an international dimension such as tourism. Diplomats are rarely seen in Casamance and in any case, from Dakar rosewood trafficking is "seen as a Gambian problem".<sup>24</sup> The Gambia and its backers, however, have bigger problems to address: in the post-Jammeh era international diplomacy and aid are focused on political stabilization and security sector reform (DW 2020).

This absence of effective action by the Senegalese, Gambian or more distant governments has left exposure of illegal timber exploitation largely to civil society, foreign journalists and INGOs. Interest has been driven by various factors. Socioenvironmental concerns highlight the need for protection and sustainable management of forests worldwide to help safeguard local livelihoods and mitigate climate change. This has also made the international timber trade subject to increasing scrutiny of its commodity chains, actors and regulations. In this context, a few local figures in Casamance have publicly advocated forest protection and mangrove restoration including Haïdar El Ali, a former Environment Minister in Senegal (Farge 2015). Of greater impact, though, have been exposés of the illegal trade in Casamance rosewood and *maquis* involvement by Western media, notably a recent BBC documentary (BBC Africa Eye 2020). Following this, the Environmental Investigation Agency, based in London and Washington DC, published a substantial report on the issue (EIA 2020). Conducting its own investigations based on BBC and EIA evidence, the large global shipping company *Compagnie Maritime d'Affrètement – Compagnie Générale Maritime* stopped its timber exports from The Gambia until further notice (Attwood 2020).

International legal instruments have also been deployed. These include the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (CITES), of which both Senegal and The Gambia are signatories. In 2017 rosewood was added

to Appendix II of CITES, covering species that “although not necessarily now threatened with extinction may become so unless trade in specimens of such species is subject to strict regulation in order to avoid utilization incompatible with their survival” (CITES Article II, Paragraph II). The uncontrolled exploitation described in Casamance is clearly at odds with sustainable management of remaining rosewood stocks. Evidence in the early 2000s of younger rosewood trees being harvested was mirrored in recent fieldwork.<sup>25</sup> Young, lesser-quality timber shows a higher ratio of pale sapwood to dark heartwood compared with timber from mature trees, indicating depletion in some areas. The Geneva-based NGO TRIAL International has also taken a legal route, building on CITES and Senegalese domestic law but focusing on criminal accountability for the consequences of the rosewood trade. With evidence showing that *maquis* involvement in timber cutting and trafficking has been considerable amid an active civil conflict, TRIAL has targeted a Gambian company (Westwood) previously involved in the export of rosewood from The Gambia to China, arguing that this amounted to the war crime of “pillage” under international law (TRIAL International 2020). TRIAL has filed a criminal complaint against the alleged owner of the company in the Swiss courts; the case is ongoing.

The actions of Western media and INGOs have thus brought Casamance to Western public attention in an unanticipated way that 40 years of civil conflict have rarely achieved, at least outside of France. Issues of trade and insecurity along a little-known African border, subject to patchy and intermittent interest even from the states concerned, have today transformed it into a minor nexus for global environmental concerns. It would be incorrect, however, to see illegal timber exploitation as a recent phenomenon tied to conflict, displacement and poverty. While large-scale internationalization of the Casamance timber trade is relatively new, as is the worrying extent of deforestation, a historical view shows longer-term overexploitation and erosion of Casamance forests, involving local and external actors, dating back to at least the Second World War.

## Concluding Discussion: Continuities in Space and Time

For nearly a century-and-a-half, informal trade across the Gambia/Casamance border has shown variable dynamics but four sets of continuities can be identified. The first concerns evolving cross-border geopolitical tensions and security issues over time. Following violence in the latter nineteenth century, fixing of the border and improved security along it still drove competition between colonial powers for trade and settlers. Later, between 1940 and 1942, the Second World War created a local cold war of smuggling, economic subversion and espionage between the British and Vichy French, using local auxiliaries.

After independence, the border became subject to periodic tensions between the Gambian and Senegalese governments, particularly in the context of the Casamance rebellion. Any related “war economies” have shown a characteristic typical of such phenomena: continuities in exploitation of and trade in local resources, as combatants of whatever side graft themselves onto and may expand existing economic activities to generate revenue (Evans 2003). While some commodity chains may therefore be bound up with violence at certain points, for the most part they are not (Meagher 2014). The trades concerned largely function through integration into broader economic



systems: a “war economy” mostly exists only insofar as it can connect with the “normal” economy somewhere (Evans 2003); in this study, the same was true of historical smuggling networks. “War economies” thus show much continuity in space (with non-conflict-related activity) and time (with activity preceding and, where relevant, following a conflict). Amid a diverse history of violence in the Lake Chad basin, for example, MacEachern (2020) similarly recounts continuities in activities and individuals even as political ends have changed and the security context has evolved.

The second point is that the whole of Casamance is to a significant extent a “borderland”. It spans no more than about 100 km north-to-south, so no given point within it is more than 50 km from the border with The Gambia or Guinea-Bissau. Border dynamics are evident to varying extents throughout Casamance, and have been since the long run-up to partition in the nineteenth century (Nugent 2019). Informal trade in Casamance thus often involves “border” activity and is sometimes continuous with wider subregional networks. In Upper Casamance this is epitomized by the lively market town of Diaobé, where traders from Senegal, The Gambia, Guinea-Bissau and Guinea-Conakry meet. This important hub sits within what Simone (2003, 245) describes as a transnational “confluence” in southeast Senegal, “where national borders are crisscrossed constantly through a variety of informal and illegal trading circuits”. Such circuits have long linked border trade with urban and more distant markets (Nugent 2019). There are again parallels with other parts of Africa where more than two countries meet, creating “a set of interlocking border zones” (MacEachern 2020, 253).

The third set of continuities concerns gaps in policing the Gambia/Casamance border and its trade flows, and sociopolitical challenges in dealing with mobile populations. Meaningful state control has always been limited and uneven, with interventions often reactive to particular circumstances or events. During the Casamance rebellion, retreat of state agencies due to violence has been evident at certain times and places, ceding territory to *maquis* control, but this is not the whole story as illegal timber exploitation clearly shows. Even where state agents are present, the informal still predominates because they are ineffective, corrupt or indeed actively engaged in such economic activity. Field research since the turn of the millennium has shown continuous involvement in timber exploitation by members of the *maquis* and Senegalese forces. For their part, *Eaux et Forêts* may have been restricted in their movements and activities but they often fail to regulate and police forestry even in areas away from the Casamance conflict. The Pata situation illustrates this (Fanchette 1999) and such problems are not confined to Casamance: Black and Sessay (1998) describe illegal charcoal production in *forêts classées* in the Senegal River Valley along the country’s northern border. This ineffectiveness can be attributed to a genuine lack of capacity and motivation, but coupled significantly with poor oversight and corruption. It can be reasonably assumed that Customs agents (in Senegal and The Gambia) must be complicit, too. The irony therefore is that both MFDC and Senegalese state actors profit from illegal exploitation of natural resources that both sides formally claim to want to protect. Ongoing failures of both the Senegalese and Gambian states, meanwhile, have allowed the illegal timber trade to extend from originally serving mainly national markets to becoming an increasingly internationalized enterprise.

Finally, continuities are evident in how the border has helped provide legitimate (if mostly informal and sometimes illegal) livelihoods for local people. They have always



done much of the hard work of cutting trees and processing timber into planks (often using hand tools) and this continues, whoever the buyers are, to help alleviate chronic poverty – worsened for many by the Casamance conflict. While significantly linked with the Casamance rebellion, then, timber exploitation also transcends it in space and time and has in any case never been completely “illegal”. More broadly, informal trade sits within deep-seated cross-border socioeconomic dynamics and has continued even when relations between colonies/states have been frosty, and amid variable and sometimes adverse security conditions. This underlines the local value of “the resources that borderlands and their limits to sovereignty involve” (MacEachern 2020, 251). As Meagher (2014) cautions, “criminalization” and “war economies” should not be conflated with what are often long-standing, informal ways of doing business and earning a livelihood, driven by normal market considerations.

Still, tensions exist between the benefits of informality and the ways in which the “limits to sovereignty” may also create spaces for predatory extraction of local natural resources and socially destructive trades. One current risk with the illegal timber trade specifically is illustrated at the start of the paper: that distant interests acting across and beyond the Gambia/Casamance border may fuel local disputes amid urban and demographic growth in Casamance and hence already-growing pressures on its land and natural resources. Elsewhere in Africa, a partial parallel exists in the case of Maputo during and after the Mozambican civil war. Once a predatory relationship had developed between the capital city and its rural hinterland through charcoal production by unemployed urban youth and government forces, both acting “with an eye to quick profits and little concern for the future” (McGregor 1998, 58), this proved difficult to dislodge once the war ended. A further similarity is that this created local land tenure conflicts when the displaced owners returned (McGregor 1997), a situation also visible at times in Lower Casamance (Evans 2014). The potential is there for the banality of illegal timber exploitation, accentuated during and by the rebellion, to provide new grounds for violence even while the long-running Casamance conflict remains unresolved.

Ways forward in policy and practice are unclear. The paper shows the disconnect between (formal) national policies and subregional trading regimes, and (informally) what happens on the ground. The relevant laws and accords established by states and multilateral organizations have little normative reality. Indeed, to some extent ECOWAS policies have created or increased informal economic activity, as Meagher (2003) notes in her comparison of policy intentions versus outcomes. A historical view furthermore shows how illegal timber extraction in Casamance and its trafficking into The Gambia are deeply illustrative of chronic state dysfunction and failure at various levels, underlined by the perceived need among INGOs recently to step in. Clearly the states concerned should apply their own laws fairly and effectively across their whole territories and cooperate more across borders; they seem more capable of doing the latter in the domain of security as such. Where laws concerning natural resource governance and trade are not applied, this is variously attributable to limited capacity, lack of political will, poor governance, corruption or insecurity. One possible space for new policy implementation could be a formal, electronic “chain of custody” or “wood tracking” system of the kind seen in some other African countries, notably Ghana (Hoare et al. 2020). Such a system ideally allows the flow of timber to be monitored and controlled from forest to end user, with associated revenues also reported – although this all still

requires effective law enforcement to back it up. While established primarily to ensure sustainable timber harvesting, chain of custody systems are also advocated as a way to prevent “conflict timber” entering the commodity chain. This approach would be similar to that taken with “conflict diamonds” through the Kimberley Process, although that remains far from perfect (Malone and Sherman 2005). Otherwise, neglect by states of the timber trade in the borderlands discussed will continue to generate local and transnational insecurity and to exacerbate threats to the planetary environment.

## Notes

1. Casamance ceased to exist as an administrative region of Senegal in 1984 when it was divided into two new regions, named for their respective capitals: Ziguinchor region to the west, and much larger Kolda region to the east. The western part of the latter split off as Sédhiou region in 2008, creating a three-way division along similar lines to historical Lower Casamance (Ziguinchor), Middle Casamance (Sédhiou) and Upper Casamance (Kolda). The older names survive in some local and much academic usage and are applied here. The paper largely concerns Lower Casamance and its borderlands with The Gambia unless otherwise indicated.
2. Interviews, August 2 and 9, 2019; personal communication from research assistant, July 3, 2021.
3. Interview, August 2, 2019. Translations of interviews are the author’s own throughout.
4. The modern state is called The Gambia, with the definite article capitalized, while the colony was known as the Gambia. The forms used therefore vary according to the historical period under discussion.
5. Interview, Ziguinchor, July 17, 2001. Three of these commodities merit comment. Wild rubber and rice were necessary substitutes for products that were, before the Second World War, heavily imported and hence became subject to the blockade (Hopkins 1973; Ginio 2006). Rice formerly came mainly from French Indochina, which also came under Vichy control with a strong Japanese military presence, while honey was important because of difficulties in obtaining sugar. Both rice and sugar were rationed (Ginio 2006).
6. Personal observation, May 5, 2004; see Nugent (2019) for an extensive account of this particular border situation.
7. Personal observation, January 5, 2016.
8. Awenengo Dalberto (2020) presents an intriguing study of how these claims of autonomy came into being.
9. Personal observations.
10. Interviews, Ziguinchor, December 2016.
11. Personal observations, March 14, 2002 and May 5, 2004.
12. Interview with village notable, Badiana, March 13, 2002.
13. Interview with rural councilor, Djinaki, May 30, 2001.
14. Interview with sawmill manager, Lower Casamance, August 6, 2019.
15. Personal observation, April 6, 2012.
16. Interview with sawmill manager, Lower Casamance, August 6, 2019.
17. Interview, Ziguinchor, March 4, 2002.
18. Interviews with senior *Eaux et Forêts* officials, Lower Casamance, 2000–2002; these problems have more recently been echoed by Farge (2015).
19. Interview with senior *Eaux et Forêts* official, Bignona, August 2, 2001.
20. Personal observations near Ebinako, May 24, 2000; near Touba, May 5, 2004; and near Brikama, March 14, 2002.
21. Personal observation, July 31, 2019.
22. Interview with sawmill manager, Lower Casamance, August 6, 2019.
23. Personal observations.
24. Diplomatic source, July 9, 2020.

25. Interview with sawmill manager, Lower Casamance, August 6, 2019; personal observations in *menuiseries* (joiners' workshops), Ziguinchor, 2001–2002 and August 2019.

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